

**Professional Issues and Concerns in School-Based Speech-Language
Pathology, A Survey**

Senior Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation with
Distinction in Speech and Hearing Sciences in the Undergraduate Colleges of The
Ohio State University

By

Sarah E. Yoho

The Ohio State University

June 2009

Project Advisors: Dr. Rebecca McCauley and Dr. Wayne Secord

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Literature Review.....	5
Methods.....	8
Results and Discussion.....	12
Summary and Conclusions.....	20
References.....	24
Appendix I.....	25

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to Dr. Rebecca McCauley and Dr. Wayne Secord, Department of Speech and Hearing Science; and also to Ann Sloan, Ohio SEAL (State Education Advocacy Leader); Brooke Jolly; Dr. Rob Fox, Department of Speech and Hearing Science; Dr. Lawrence Feth, Department of Speech and Hearing Science.

Abstract

With the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act, speech-language pathologists have been expected to focus on language and literacy in their work with school age children. The effect this new push for Speech-Language Pathologists to work with children who have literacy difficulties has on job performance and satisfaction is largely unstudied. Speech-Language Pathologists already struggle with large caseloads, a lack of resources, and a broad range of disorders and cases, and this new focus may very well be underfunded and difficult to implement with the current shortage of school-based SLPs. This study is an attempt to begin to evaluate these issues. The expectation is that school-based SLPs will report issues such as too-large caseloads, too broad a scope of practice, and a general lack of support from school administration; all common themes in past studies. The major point of interest will be if and how the newly added guidelines from ASHA have changed the climate. The study will be done using an online survey sent out to group of Ohio school-based SLPs. The participants will be asked a series of questions about what their current level of knowledge is in a particular area and what they feel their ideal level of knowledge should be in that area. They will also be asked how they divide up their work time and if they feel that is the optimal breakdown for the job they are expected to do. At the end of the survey, demographic and personal information such as number of years in practice and their current work setting will be asked to ascertain what effect, if any, those factors have on their responses. This survey could be used to give

feedback to ASHA about the current attitudes and self-assessed competencies prevailing in the school-based SLP population. This study could potentially be used as a proto-type for a future, national survey.

Introduction

This study looks at the changing expectations for school-based Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) and what that means in practical terms for the therapists' day-to-day lives. Another undergraduate student, Brooke Jolly, two research advisors, Dr. Rebecca McCauley and Dr. Wayne Secord, and myself conducted this project. The four of us jointly designed and implemented a survey, using the Internet survey service, SurveyMonkey.

This survey was conducted at this point in time as a response to the recent changes put into effect by the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) after the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act. Dr. Wayne Secord had conducted once in the 1980s and once in the 1990s similar surveys. The new guidelines from ASHA put much more emphasis on language and literacy in therapy. This is a drastic paradigm shift in the world of school-based Speech-Language Pathology, as the area of literacy is not traditionally thought of as being under the profession's scope of practice. These changes have forced therapists to alter many aspects of their jobs including but not limited to, caseload size, division of workload, and the implementation of evidence-based practices.

These ASHA standards were put into effect with little follow-up in terms of evaluating the reality of their impact on job performance and job satisfaction for SLPs. This survey is an attempt to begin that evaluation.

Speech-Language Pathologists, particularly those who are school-based, already report a general lack of sufficient time due to large caseloads and a very

wide scope of practice so that it is often difficult to be completely proficient in every area. This survey had an expectation that those complaints would hold true with the new standards in place. Other points of interest in the survey are how SLPs break down their time in terms of time spent in the therapy room versus in collaboration with teachers as well as how proficient they feel they are in individual areas of practice versus how proficient they feel they should be.

Literature Review

School-based Speech-Language Pathologists are expected to be proficient in a wide-range of clinical diagnosis and treatment areas. It has been suggested that very large workloads have negative effects on the satisfaction of school-based professionals (Blood et al., 2002). Although school Speech-Language Pathologists are unique in the world of educational professionals, as they have a very defined and specific role as compared to special educators, they have an excessive range of practices to be responsible for. Since the 1970s, the perception of what falls under the description of 'language' has expanded dramatically. It has evolved from vocabulary and grammar to encompass pragmatics, oral-language, and phonemic awareness to name just a few components. Most recently, written language skills have fallen under the umbrella of language that SLPs must address. Reading and writing proficiency in all school-age clients from pre-school to high school are now the concern of Speech-Language Pathologists (Ukrainetz and Frequez, 2003).

The new ASHA guidelines for scope of practice of SLPs include the area of language and literacy as well as all former areas of practice. The guidelines do not, however, give an idea of what is outside of the scope of practice and how to draw a dividing line between that which is the classroom teacher's responsibility and that or the Speech-Language Pathologist. In the past, this division between classroom teachers and therapists was a source of dissatisfaction for SLPs. It created a sense of isolation and ineffective therapy (Ukrainetz and Frequez, 2003). Many

therapists, to alleviate this feeling, have increasingly adopted the integrated service-delivery model.

In the integrated service-delivery model, the Speech-Language Pathologists 'strength' or expertise is commonly thought of as being in the area of language development. The Classroom Teacher's perceived expertise is often in the area of curriculum and classroom content. Studies have found that most if not all SLPs use integrated services in the area of language but very few therapists use the model in the areas of fluency and voice (16% and 5% respectively). Most SLPs are in agreement that collaboration between themselves and Classroom Teachers can be beneficial in that both parties have knowledge that when shared can increase successfulness (Elksnin and Capilouto, 1994).

Another relatively new approach in therapy is the idea of evidence-based practice. The new policy-driven guidelines of the profession are calling for evidenced-based results in the therapy room. This practice is heavily influencing the ways in which therapists are approaching new literacy training. The catalyst of this new emphasis is indisputably President Bush's "No Child Left Behind Act" of 2001, which calls for scientifically based research for professionals in the public schools. Unfortunately, it remains that many SLPs are unacquainted with these new measures in the areas of literacy and evidenced-based practice (Justice, 2006).

Legislation plays a crucial role in shaping the day-to-day practices of the school SLP. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1991 was one of many such legislative acts that served to redefine the role of the Speech-

Language Pathologist in the schools. After IDEA, therapists serviced more communication disorders as well as children with more severe disabilities and complications. This created a drastic increase in caseload for many SLPs, resulting in a greater demand for therapists in educational settings (Rosa-Lugo, Rivera, McKeown, 1998). The No Child Left Behind Act has had similar effects on the profession.

A more comprehensive study of the impact of the broad scope of practice of school-based SLPs is needed to understand the real-world implications. Any change in practice needs to be studied to better understand the SLPs role in the schools. Those studies should focus on obtaining data on everyday realistic practices as well as the idyllic and preferred practices of the therapist (Ukrainetz and Fresquez, 2003). Changes in training and education of SLPs must be made to reflect those realities.

Methods

Subjects

Survey participants were school-based Speech-Language Pathologists who work in Ohio (two respondents indicated they worked in a state other than Ohio). Participants were ASHA members. Out of the 1500 certified Speech Language Pathologists in Ohio, 160 responded. Approximately 70% of the respondents were 41 years or older. Approximately 50% of the respondents indicated they worked in a suburban setting. Most subjects worked solely in the public schools, while a few worked in preschool settings or were employed in private practice in addition to their school employment. Approximately 50% held a Masters as their highest educational degree (Table A).

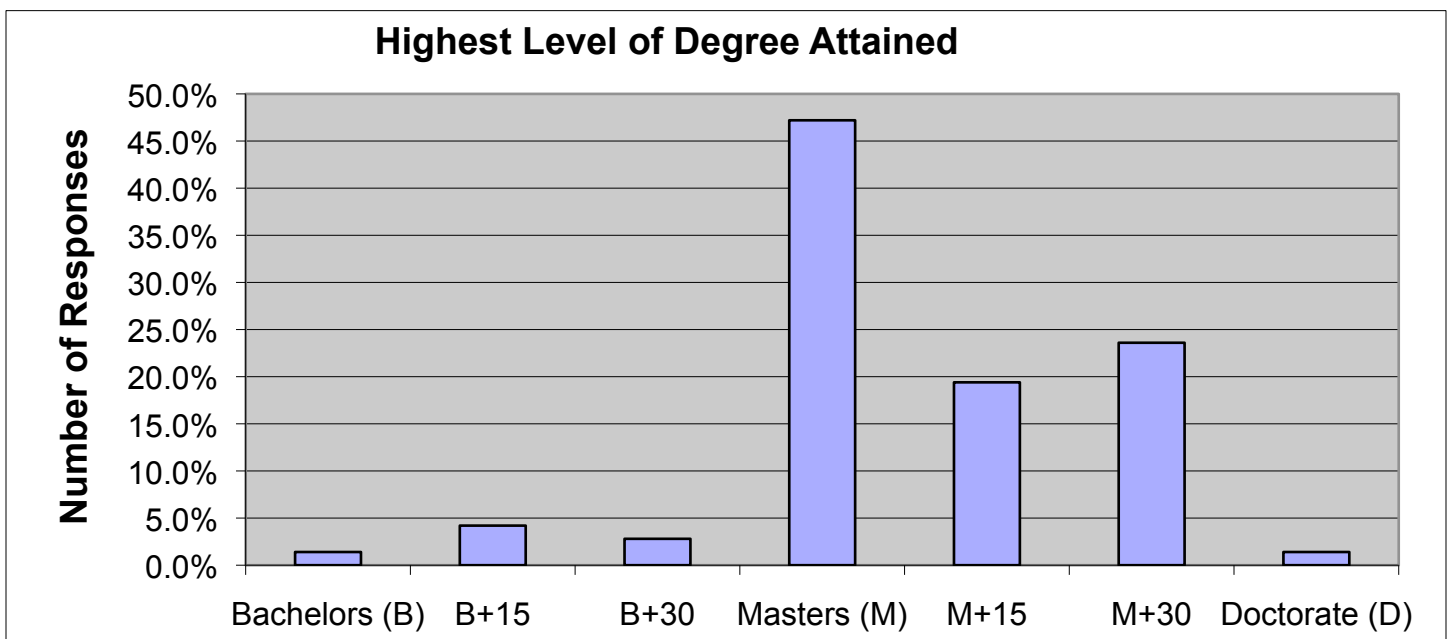


Table A

Materials

The survey was designed and hosted using the survey website SurveyMonkey.com. An outside site was used to host a PDF file which participants received upon completion of the survey. The PDF file was “101 Ways to Help Children Communicate and Learn in School” written by Dr. Wayne Secord. E-mail was used to distribute the survey link. Statistics on survey data were run using the software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Procedures

The survey was designed and implemented using SurveyMonkey, an Internet survey site. The survey formatting was based on two past surveys done by Dr. Wayne Secord. The survey link was e-mailed out to Ann Sloan, Ohio State Education Advocacy Leader (SEAL). She then distributed the link via e-mail to Ohio school-based Speech Language Pathologists. The survey consisted of 18 questions regarding participants’ levels of knowledge in various areas from their knowledge of assessment and intervention to knowledge of language and literacy intervention. The participants were asked to rate how knowledgeable they felt they were in each area, from 1 being little knowledge to 7 being very thorough knowledge. They then were asked to rate how knowledgeable they felt they should be in that area, again on a scale from 1 to 7. After the series of 18 questions, they were then asked to list the two areas of knowledge that they personally felt they

had the greatest disparity in between their actual level of knowledge and their ideal level of knowledge. They were asked to rank order the causes for that disparity from a choice of 7: lack of time, lack of money to take relevant workshops, lack of support from school administration, lack of confidence in ability to acquire the knowledge base, too many areas of practice requiring expertise. They were then asked to rate their level of interaction with classroom teachers on a scale of 5 from 1 to 2 meetings per year to weekly or biweekly meetings. The follow-up question asked about the nature of those interactions; what did the Speech Language Pathologists feel they did the most in terms of teacher interactions. The choices were explaining to teachers how to reinforce SLP work in the classroom, reviewing and planning the ongoing intervention program together, providing a knowledge base on communication disorders for teachers, providing progress reports to teachers, soliciting ideas from teachers for work with the caseload, and working with the teacher to get an increased knowledge base of the curriculum. They were also asked how much they value those interactions individually. The final significant question was an evaluation of a service delivery model. Participants were asked to divide up the amount of time they felt they spent in each capacity from the therapy room, the classroom, and in consultation. The question required a percentage answer, which must add up to 100%. For example, they could answer that they spent 50% of their time in the therapy room, 30% in the classroom, and 20% in consultation. Next they were asked what their ideal distribution would be for their caseload. The remaining questions asked

about personal data; how many years they had been in the schools, what work setting (rural, suburban, urban) they currently worked in, years since they had received their CCCs (certificate of clinical competence), their current number of students on their caseload, if they worked in Ohio, their age, and their highest level of education achieved. They were also given room for comments.

When the participants finished the survey, they were redirected to a site hosting the Second PDF. Their data was stored in SurveyMonkey, and was analyzed using both SurveyMonkey's analysis tools and exported into SPSS for further statistically analysis.

Results and Discussion

When evaluating the responses to the first 18 questions regarding actual and ideal levels of knowledge in differing areas, a general pattern emerged. Participants tended to feel that they had an average level of knowledge for each of the areas and felt they should have a much more thorough knowledge base for each particular area. The curves for actual level of knowledge tend to be a normal-curve in all categories as opposed to the left-skewed curves for each of the ideal level of knowledge.

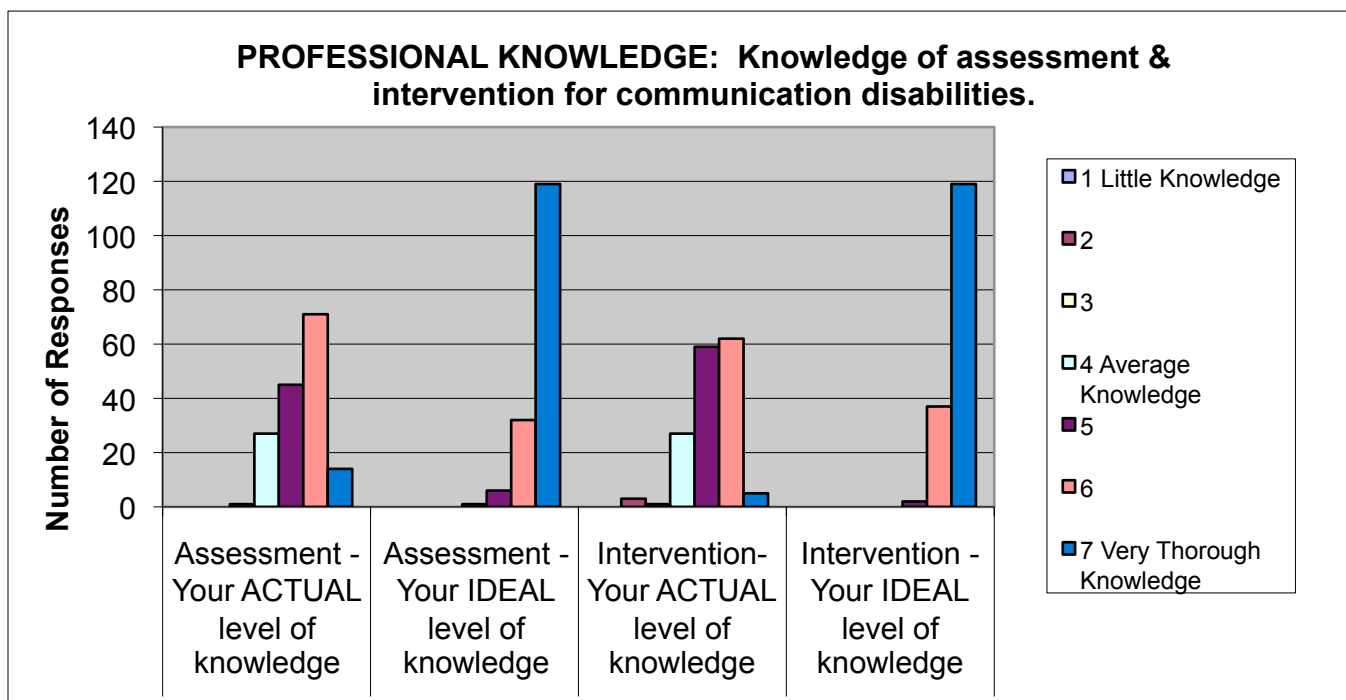


Table 1

Even though Speech Language Pathologists tended to feel they knew more in general about assessment and intervention of communication disabilities

(something that was expected to be rated as such), they still felt that they should have a more thorough knowledge base (Table 1).

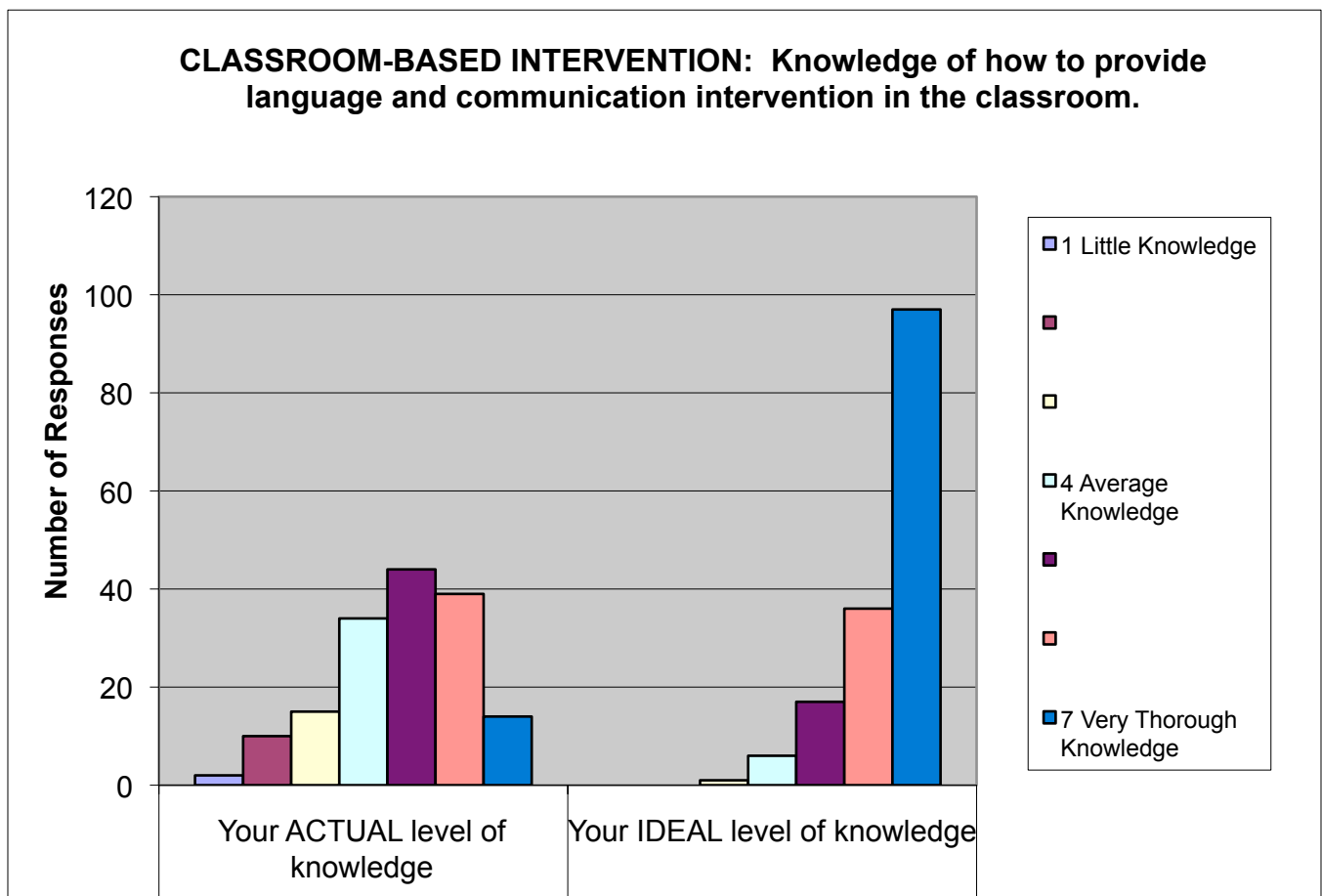


Table 2

When asked about more collaborative activities such as classroom-based intervention (Table 2), where the Speech Pathologist would provide services in the regular classroom, many more respondents felt they had less knowledge than they should. Approximately 57% rated their actual level of knowledge between 4 and 5 (4 being average knowledge). Compared to the 45% who rated the question in Table 1 as having an actual level of knowledge of 6 on the 7-point scale.

One point of significant interest in the survey was respondent's response to the question concerning evidence-based practice (Table 3), as this topic is gaining particular attention on the national speech-pathology scene. The survey found that 64% of respondents felt they had average (4 to 5) levels of knowledge on finding the evidence and 57% indicated average (4 to 5) levels of knowledge on using the evidence. Over 80% felt they should have very thorough knowledge (6 to 7) levels in both categories. This indicates that therapists are aware of the important of this area, but have not found many ways of successfully implementing it into their practice as of yet.

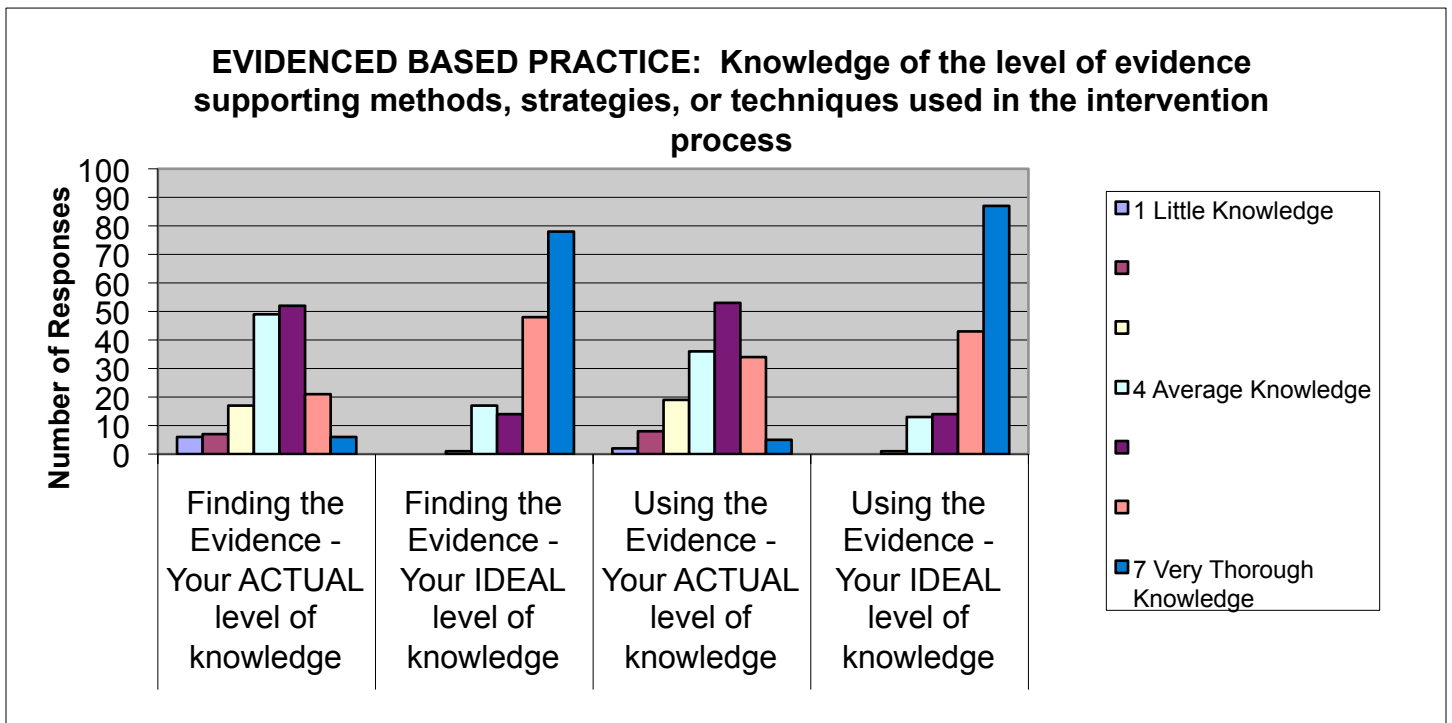


Table 3

When the respondents were asked to rank order the reasons why they felt they had such a great disparity in actual and desired level of knowledge, the results were consistent with expectations: a general lack of time and too broad a scope of practice were targeted as the main reason. The reason they ranked as having the least significance was a lack of confidence in their ability to acquire the knowledge, indicating that they feel they are capable of becoming better informed, but they do not have the time.

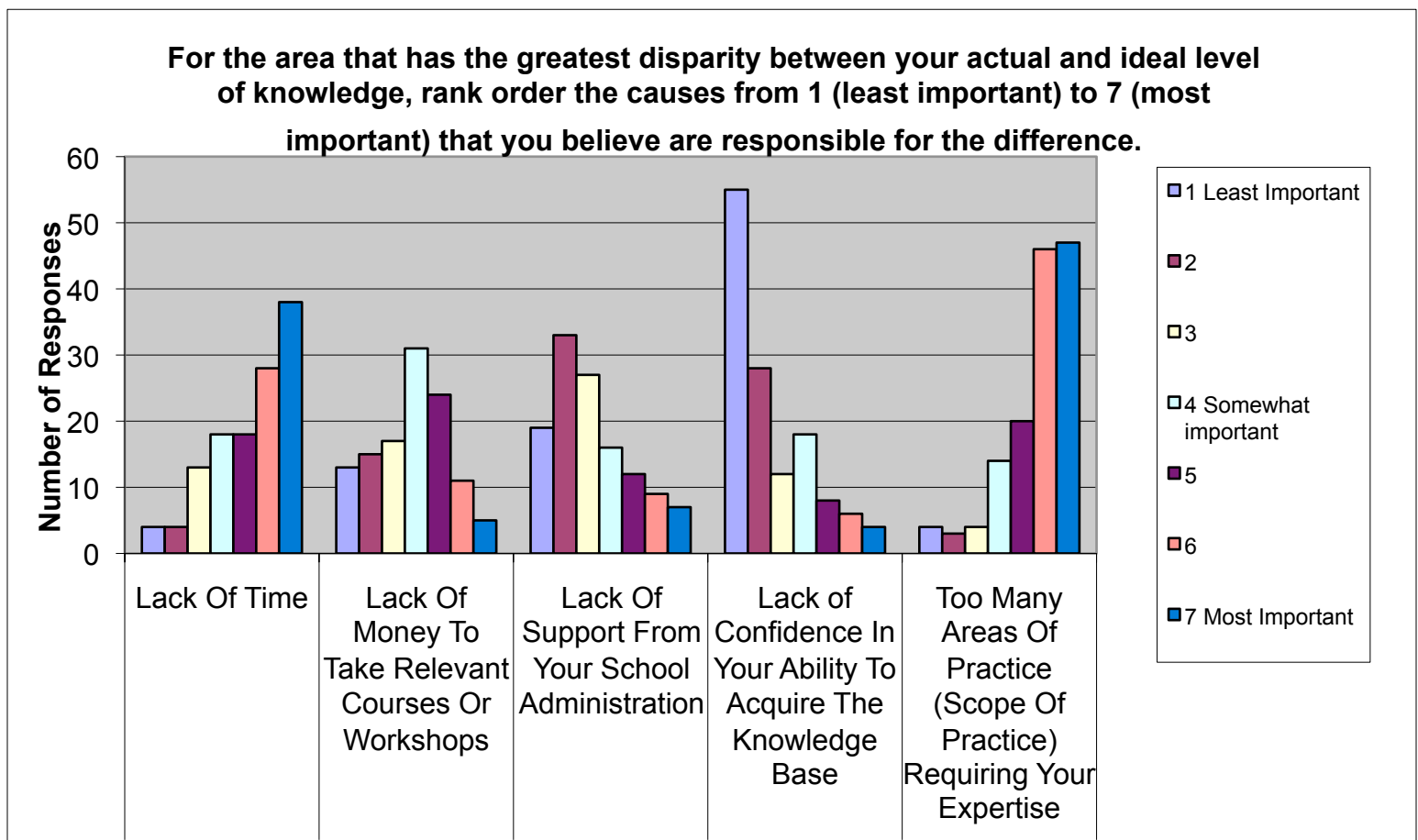


Table 4

A possible causative factor in the Speech Language Pathologists' lack of time is their large caseloads in the schools. Over 56% indicated that they had caseloads of over 50 students (Table 5).

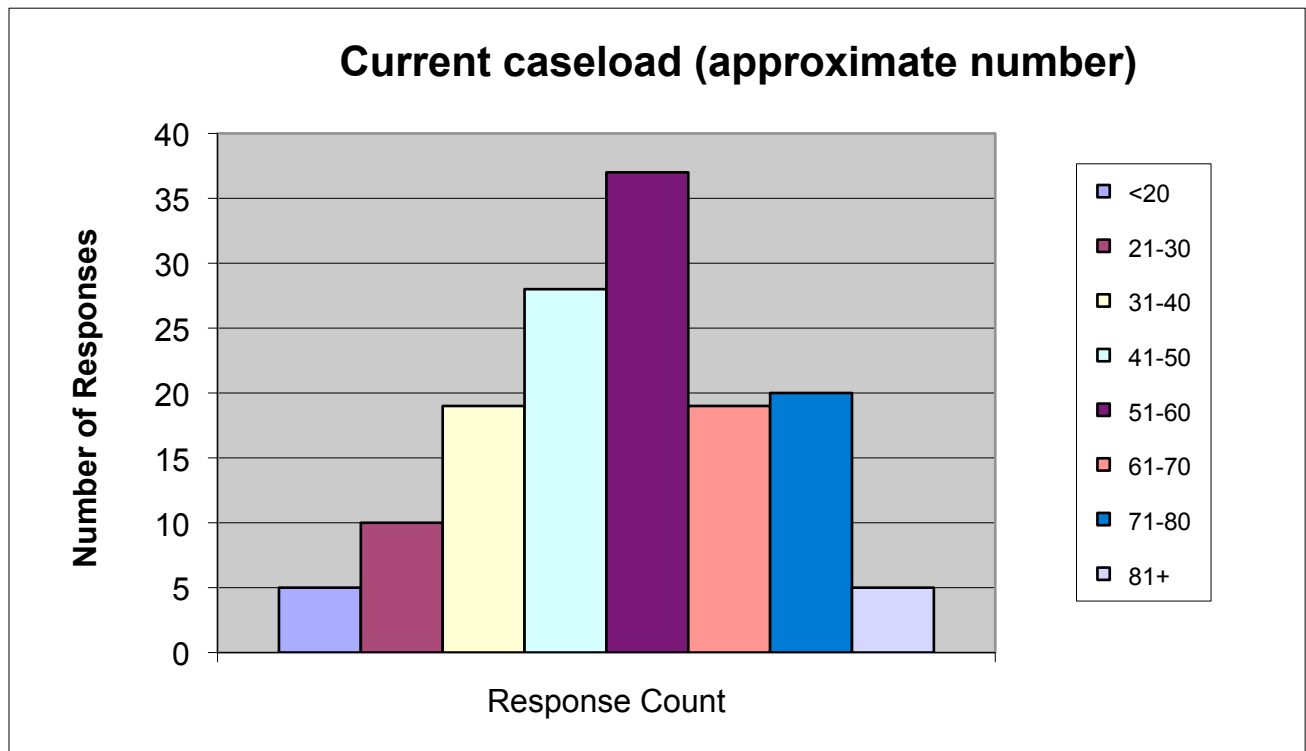


Table 5

The Speech Language Pathologists indicated that they meet with classroom teachers frequently; over 50% reported that they meet weekly or biweekly (Table 6). However, the following question asked about the natures of those interactions. Respondents were given a choice of 6 natures of interaction, three being what are typically considered 'expert' activities, and three being what are considered more

‘collaborative’. Respondents indicated that the interactions they have the most frequently were the expert activities, giving progress reports to teachers, soliciting ideas from teachers, and providing ideas to teachers (Table 7).

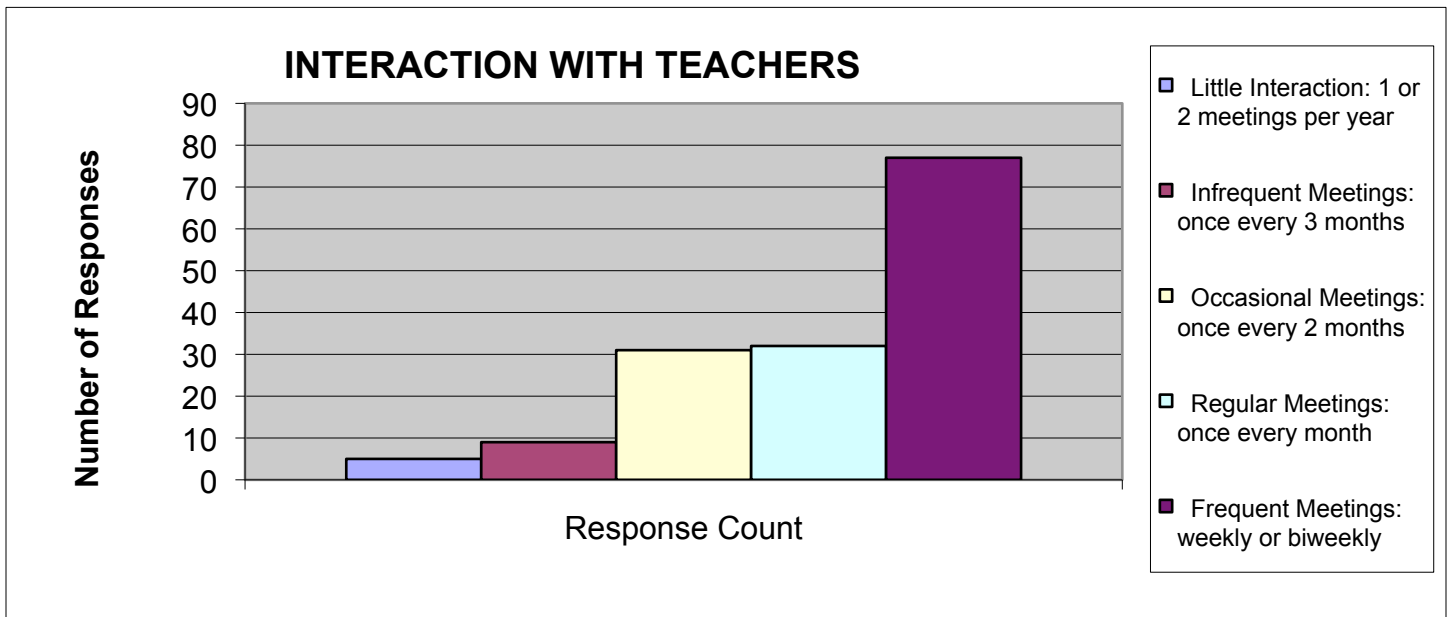


Table 6

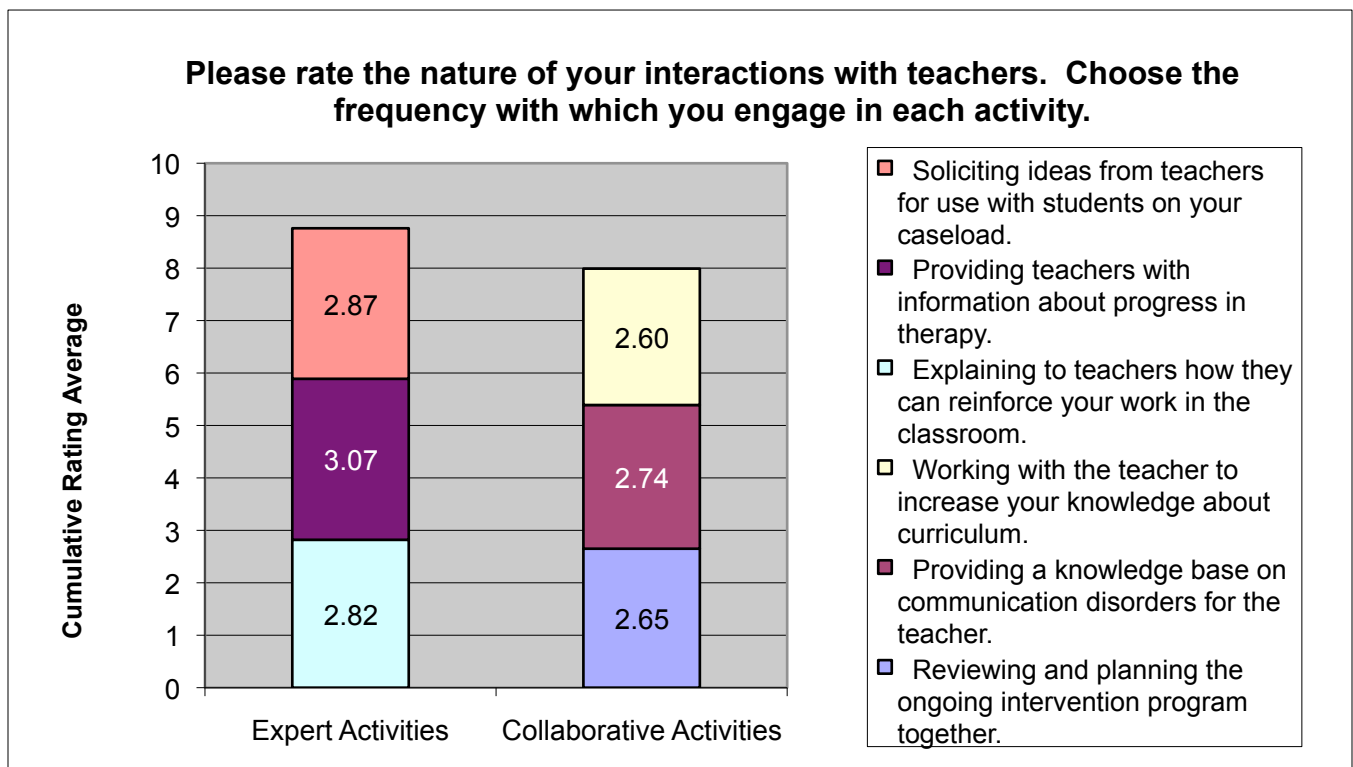


Table 7

The last question before the personal data section was a service delivery model breakdown. It was expected that therapists would indicate that they spend the most time in the therapy room and that, although they would like the ration to be less extreme, they would want to continue to spend over 50% of their time in direct therapy. Respondents indicated that they spend 62% of their time in the therapy room, and 38% of their time providing services outside of direct therapy (in the classroom and consultation). They would optimally like to spend only 46% of the time in therapy and 54% in the classroom and consultation (Table 8). That was a deviation from expectations. This indicates that therapists are in agreement with the new emphasis on the national organization level that more time should be spent in the classrooms and out of the therapy room.

When the results of this question were cross-tabbed with age, it was found that the youngest group (21-30 years of age) felt the idea program should be 44% therapy room and 56% classroom/consultation. The oldest group (61-70 years of age) felt very differently, 55% therapy room and 45% classroom/consultation. This is perhaps due to the new emphasis in graduate programs towards professional collaboration.

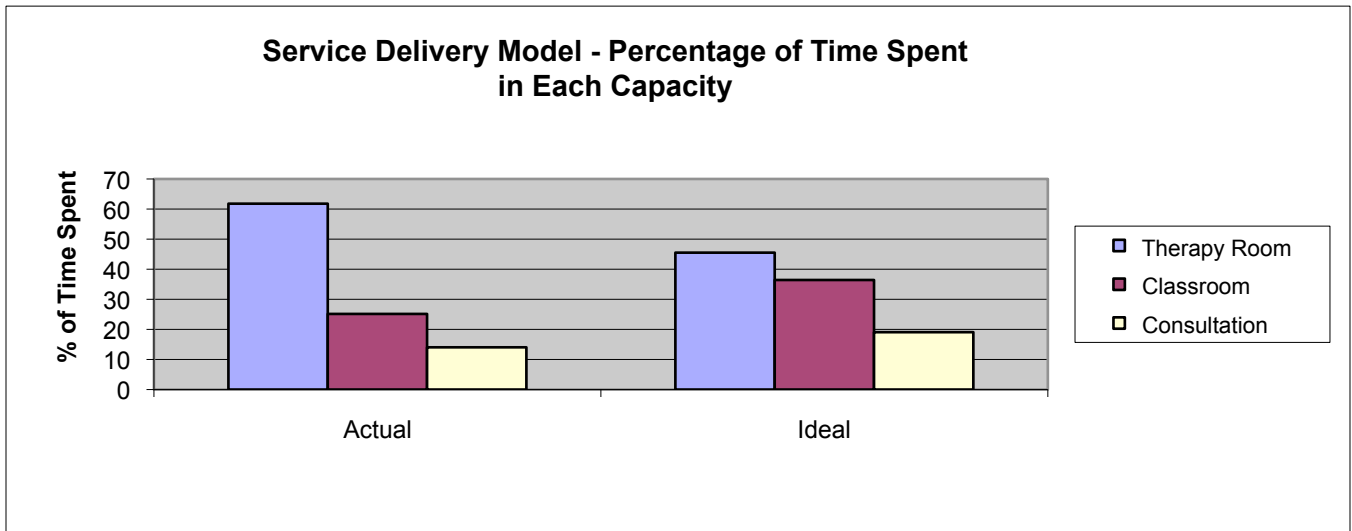


Table 8

Age was one of the many factors that could be cross-tabbed with the data to further analyze the results. Future investigation into the survey data should be done to determine other precipitating factors in responses.

Summary and Conclusions

As expected, the large caseload of many school-based Speech-Language Pathologists and the broad scope of practice of the profession is the leading factor holding therapists back from adopting the emerging ideas of collaborative practice. The addition of literacy into that scope of practice is only one small factor contributing to the concerns of Speech Pathologists.

The responses consistently indicated that respondents believed they should have a more thorough knowledge in all areas addressed in the survey. There were significant differences in ratings between actual and ideal knowledge in each of the 18 areas listed. They indicated that lack of time and too broad a scope of practice were the main causes of that disparity. They did not feel that they had an inability to acquire more knowledge if given the proper amount of time and resources. This is a good indication that if the shortage of Speech Language Pathologists in the schools were to be alleviated, more therapists might be able to obtain the knowledge bases that they desire and need to be as successful as possible in their roles as school-based professionals.

When asked about interaction with teachers, respondents reported that they spend the most time simply giving progress reports of children to teachers, the least collaborative of the choices of natures of interaction. They felt that they spent the least time doing things such as working together with the teacher to develop an intervention plan, the most collaborative of the natures. Unfortunately, when asked how much they value each of those interactions, they rated working

on the ongoing intervention plan together with classroom teachers as the least valued. This would be assumed to be a cause of concern for ASHA, the national organization, as they place high value on collaborative activities such as this. One arena where this attitude could possibly be changed is in the graduate degree programs of the universities. If the graduate programs emphasized the importance of having a healthy, ongoing relationship with the teachers in the schools, more Speech Pathologists may see this as something they should value highly. There is evidence that this could be a success as indicated in the results of the survey question regarding literacy, the new area of scope of practice for therapists. The youngest respondents, who possibly had some sort of literacy emphasis in their graduate programs, felt much stronger about the importance of literacy intervention understanding.

Respondents indicated that they spend most of their time in the therapy room, and less of their time providing services outside of direct therapy (in the classroom and consultation). They would optimally like to spend less of the time in the therapy room than in the classroom and in consultation. This is in agreement with the new emphasis on Speech-Language Pathologists spending less time in direct therapy and more time in the classrooms. This survey is the first time that Secord's surveys of this nature have seen that result, a very positive point to be noted. The respondents who felt the strongest about this approach shift were the youngest group of respondents. Real change may be possible if that trend continues in newly graduated therapists and is coupled with an improvement in

the shortage of Speech Pathologists in general. Perhaps with less of a shortage of professionals, smaller caseloads would be seen, resulting in therapists having more time to learn about those areas of practice that they may be less familiar with.

A future possibility for this survey could be a more national dispersion. It would be of great importance to see if the results from Ohio would hold true for the rest of the country as a whole. It would also be of great interest to statistically compare the results of this survey to the two past, similar surveys done by Secord in the past two decades. This analysis would give longitudinal data, which would be very useful in evaluating development in the field over a period of three decades. More extensive cross tabbing should be done on the current data sets to ascertain if any statistically significant trends emerge.

If the survey were to be implemented in a more national fashion, some revisions should be made. If any survey-bias exists it should be corrected, such as wording of certain questions. In particular, respondents should be asked to indicate their degree of employment. Many respondents indicated that they only worked half time in the schools. Some worked in pre-schools or with special populations, which significantly impacted their answers. A question of high concern for many respondents was regarding how long ago they had obtained their CCCs (certificate of clinical competence, awarded by ASHA). As some older therapists were 'grandfathered' in, and were not required to obtain CCCs, this created confounding factor in that the survey had no option for those without

CCCs. A few respondents also indicated a desire for clearer wording of the survey questions.

Overall, the data obtained from this survey is significant in the fact that it reflects that Speech Language Pathologists in Ohio understand that there is an ongoing paradigm shift in their profession. If the factors discussed were improved upon, this could potentially be a very important national survey.

References

- Blood, Gordon W., et al. "Predicting Job Satisfaction Among Speech-Language Pathologists Working in Public Schools." Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools 33 (2002): 282-90.
- Elksnin, Linda K., and Gilson J. Capilouto. "Speech-Language Pathologists' Perceptions of Integrated Service Delivery in School Settings." Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools 25 (1994): 258-67.
- Blanchard, Margorie M., and E. H. Nober. "The Impact of State and Federal Legislation on Public School Speech, Language, and Hearing Clinicians." Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools IX (1978): 77-84.
- Ukrainetz, Teresa A., and Elena F. Fresquez. "'What Isn't Language?': A Qualitative Study of the Role of the School Speech-Language Pathologist." Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools 34 (2003): 284-98.
- Rosa-Lugo, Linda I., Elizabeth A. Rivera, and Susan W. McKeown. "Meeting the Critical Shortage of Speech-Language Pathologists to Serve the Public Schools- Collaborative Rewards." Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools 29 (1998): 232-42.
- Justice, Laura M. "Evidence-Based Practice, Response to Intervention, and the Prevention of Reading Difficulties." Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools 37 (2006): 284-97.